

United States Attorney's Office

Northern District of Iowa



PRESS RELEASE

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For further information contact:

Janet Petersen

(712) 255-6011

Sioux City, Iowa

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS DISCUSS ROLES IN FIGHT AGAINST GANG CRIME IN SIOUX CITY METRO AREA

United States Attorney Matt M. Dummermuth and several local law enforcement officials had this message for gang members in Sioux City: "We know you are here. If you break the law, we will work together to send you to prison."

Dummermuth presided over a press conference today featuring Patrick Jennings, Woodbury County Attorney; Ed Matney, Dakota County Attorney; Glenn Parrett, Woodbury County Sheriff; James Wagner, Dakota County Sheriff; Joe Frisbie, Chief, Sioux City Police Department; Scot Ford, Chief, South Sioux City Police Department; Gary Niles, Chief Juvenile Court Officer, Iowa 3rd Judicial District; Thomas Frisch, Parole Supervisor, Iowa 3rd Judicial District Department of Correctional Services; Michael Kuhn, Resident-Agent-in Charge, Immigration and Customs Enforcement; and Mickey Leadingham, Resident-Agent-in Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives.

At the federal level in the last few months alone, two gang members were convicted of robbing a convenience store in Sioux City and now face up to life in federal prison. Dozens of other gang members in the area have been convicted under firearm and drug statutes, including, most recently, a 19-year-old man and a 22-year-old man who were sentenced yesterday to 40 months and 120 months in federal prison after their involvement in a gang-related drive-by shooting in downtown Sioux City in May 2007. Another gang member from California was sentenced in May of 2007 to 50 years in federal prison for conspiring to distribute methamphetamine. There is no parole from a federal prison term.

"The signs of gang problems are here in Sioux City: graffiti, vandalism, drugs, robberies, violence," said Dummermuth. "Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in Iowa and Nebraska are all working together on these problems."

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Since the announcement of an anti-gang initiative in 2005, federal prosecutors have played an increasingly active role in suppressing violent gang activity. Every United States Attorney met with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to form new, or strengthen existing, violent crime working groups. These working groups were tasked with 1) identifying and prioritizing the critical violent crime problems that are susceptible to a coordinated approach; and 2) developing both short and long-range strategies that best serve the needs of their communities.

In the Sioux City metro area, gang-related cases are being worked primarily by the Sioux City Police Department's Gang Enforcement Unit; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; Immigration and Customs Enforcement; Iowa Juvenile Court Services; and Iowa Department of Correctional Services. Other agencies involved are: the Woodbury County Attorney's Office; Dakota County Attorney's Office; Woodbury County Sheriff's Office; Dakota County Sheriff's Office; and South Sioux City Police Department. Federal funds have been used to pay law enforcement overtime, obtain digital camera and other electronic equipment, obtain equipment to assist in painting over graffiti, and fund gang prevention outreach programs.

In investigating gang-related crimes, special consideration has been given to the use of federal statutes that either carry potential mandatory minimum sentences or provide for approaches that may not be available under state law. These statutes are considered in addition to appropriate state laws when deciding where to prosecute gang crimes. In the last several years, local gang members have been convicted in State court for felony criminal gang participation and given prison sentences.

"We are working together to make sure gang criminals are sent to prison for the longest time possible," said Patrick Jennings, Woodbury County Attorney. "If there is a good state law, we'll go that way. If there is a better federal law, we'll go that way. The point is to take serious offenders off the streets and make our community safer."

Education is also a part of the anti-gang effort.

The Sioux City Police Department has conducted anti-gang rallies in elementary schools since the early 1990's to educate kids on the dangers of gangs and to teach them there are alternatives to joining gangs. The Woodbury County Sheriff's Office has also conducted gang awareness education in schools and for youth groups.

"As long as there is ignorance you will have gangs," said Sioux City Police Chief Frisbie. "That is why I encourage parents to talk to their children, even at a young age, about the dangers of being involved in gangs."

Law enforcement agencies can't fight the gang problem alone. Community involvement is also needed.

"If people see signs of gang crime, they need to report it," said Dummermuth. "If parents see signs of gang involvement with their children, they need to stop it. If we all work together, we can truly have an impact on gang crime and make this community safer."